

Va. Department of Environmental Quality Non-Agency Data Initiative

The goal of the non-agency data initiative is to identify and use all appropriate water quality data in order to increase the percentage of assessed waters in Virginia.

Brief History- In August 2004 VADEQ hired James Beckley as the newly created Water Quality Data Liaison. The duties of the water quality data liaison include the following:

1. Request and receive any available water quality data collected by citizen monitoring groups, local, state and federal government agencies outside of VADEQ, and any other potential sources for data to include in the 305(b)/303(d) Water Quality Assessment.
2. Administer citizen monitoring grants averaging a total of \$100,000/year with emphasis on generating data that will be useable in the Water Quality Assessment.
3. Provide technical assistance to citizen monitoring groups and support water monitoring events across Virginia.
4. Manage and maintain all submitted non-agency water quality data.
5. Actively participate in the Virginia Water Monitoring Council.

How non-agency data is reviewed and used by DEQ-

1. Level III- Methods Approved- (approved QAPP, and approved methods)

-Data will be used in 305 (b) Assessment and 303(d) List of Impaired Waters.

2. Level II- Methods partially approved-(Approved QAPP, use similar but not approved methods)

-May be used for 305(b) Assessment but not for 303(d) listing purposes.

DEQ has not fully approved of the sampling or testing methods used by a group.

Data may not be as accurate as data pulled and tested by DEQ.

3. Level I- Methods Not Approved- (QAPP and/or methods are not approved by DEQ)

-Data may not be suitable for reporting purposes. However, the data can serve as a critical means for DEQ to find sample locations and watersheds for future DEQ monitoring..

Current Outreach to non-agency data sources- Our partners with non-DEQ organizations is steadily growing. At our last inventory, DEQ is working with the following number of groups involved in water quality monitoring.

- 156 citizen monitoring and non-profit organizations
- 22 Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- 19 State and Federal agencies
- 17 counties and other local governments
- 14 colleges and universities

Through these partnerships, VADEQ has received and is reviewing non-agency data that covers over 900 separate sample locations in Virginia and are being reviewed by DEQ for potential use in the 2006 305(b)/303(d) Water Quality Assessment.

Future Plans- In an effort to expand the available pool of accurate and reliable water quality data from non-agency sources, VADEQ is pursuing the following:

VPDES Voluntary Monitoring Initiative- statewide implementation in 2006

The Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) voluntary monitoring initiative will help to further increase the quantity of DEQ approved water quality data for assessment. Starting in a statewide solicitation in January of 2006, VPDES facilities will be asked to voluntarily monitor upstream of their wastewater treatment facility for pH, dissolved oxygen, temperature, and any other water quality parameters that are routinely run at the VPDES facility laboratory. VPDES facilities have the technical and professional experience to perform water quality monitoring due to their routine monitoring of wastewater effluent.

Participating facilities will benefit by playing a proactive role in the environment which will strengthen the relationship between the facility and the local community. Participating facilities may receive environmental awards by DEQ and other organizations.

In Virginia there are at least 1140 permitted dischargers. Even a modest 25% participation rate would generate over 285 additional water quality monitoring sites in Virginia. Data generated thorough this initiative will be treated as any other non-agency data and once reviewed and approved by DEQ, will be initially used in upcoming 305(b) assessment reports starting in 2008.

QA/QC of Biological Monitoring- Anticipated completion in 2005

One of the biggest limiting factors in increasing the usefulness of non-agency benthic macro invertebrate data is the lack of scientifically sound guidance to approve such data. To address this, DEQ is currently drafting guidance that will help citizen monitoring groups and help DEQ staff use this valuable data. The guidance is based, in part, on work in other states including Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and California.

Non-agency database- Anticipated completion in 2006

1. Database will be developed by VADEQ in 2006 using a portion of supplemental 106 Grant funds.
2. Database will be web-enabled for citizen groups and other non-agencies to log into and submit data via batch uploading.
3. Database will consist of chemical and biological parameters, including benthic macro invertebrate data.
4. Data submitted will be stored and reviewed by VADEQ. If approved, the data will be used for the assessment.

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A National Environmental Information Exchange Network (NEIEN) grant for \$250,000 has been submitted (in 2005) to also develop a web portal. If funded, it would enable non-agency data entered into a DEQ hosted webpage and transmit this data to the national water quality database operated by EPA.